

## **General Counsel Presents ADR Awards**

The Air Force General Counsel, the Hon. Mary L. Walker, presented the first-ever General Counsel Alternative Dispute Resolution Awards to two organizations and one individual before an audience of 150 Air Force ADR practitioners at the 2005 Worldwide ADR Champion Training Conference in San Antonio on Thursday, December 1, 2005. The awards are intended to recognize those organizations and individuals who made significant contributions to further the goals of Air Force ADR policy and the Air Force ADR Program.

The training conference, put on by the Dispute Resolution Division of the General Counsel's Office, brought together ADR Champions and program managers from every major Air Force installation in the world and all Major Commands to learn about Air Force ADR policies and philosophy, roles and responsibilities of those who administer installation ADR programs, and to share best practices with other ADR practitioners. By all accounts, the conference was a rousing success.

Ms. Walker presented the award for best small organization (less than 100 workplace disputes annually) to Space & Missile Systems Center ADR Program at Los Angeles AFB, California. Accepting on behalf of SMC was Leonard Gonzales, SMC ADR Champion. SMC was cited for its innovation in developing comprehensive dispute resolution training programs and infrastructure that has dramatically increased the use of ADR to resolve workplace disputes more effectively.

The large organization award went to the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center at Tinker AFB, OK, for its extensive work integrating ADR and other dispute resolution and conflict management techniques and training programs into the regular operating procedures of a large Air Logistics Center with thousands of civilian employees, and exporting those best practices to other installations. Accepting the award on behalf of Tinker was Leigh Ann Bryson, Tinker ADR Program Manager.

The ADR organizational awards recognize that strong and effective ADR programs are a team effort, requiring the concerted involvement of many players, including legal, personnel, EEO, commanders and their staffs, management, and unions. The SMC and Tinker ADR programs both exhibit a high degree of interaction and cooperation among these vital stakeholders to reduce workplace conflicts and to resolve disputes as early as possible and at the lowest possible organizational levels, using fewer resources.

Sandra A. McGruder of the Air Force Human Resource Management School at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, was named the recipient of the ADR Award for outstanding individual achievement. As the Course Director for Air Force basic and advanced mediation training, Ms. McGruder has led the development and worldwide deployment of state-of-the-art mediation and other ADR training programs that have produced one of the largest, most professional mediator corps in the federal government.

In her presentation remarks, Ms. Walker stressed the importance of alternative means of dispute resolution, and the key contributions of Air Force ADR practitioners to meet future Air Force mission challenges, including implementation of the National Security Personnel System: "With the dawning of the most substantial changes to the civilian personnel system in the last 50 years," Ms. Walker observed, "finding more effective and efficient ways to manage and resolve workplace conflicts is not just a good idea; it is a mission imperative. ADR provides many of the tools to meet this imperative, but it takes more than just effective use of these tools; it requires vision and planning that transform these tools into a comprehensive, integrated approach to workplace conflict...In short, we seek to prevent those conflicts that can be prevented, and to quickly and fairly resolve those that can't. An infrastructure of knowledge, skill, and some unconventional thinking, using time-tested ADR techniques as the launch pad, is the key to our success. The ADR Awards presented today are intended to celebrate these attributes."

Thanks to the outstanding efforts of people like Len Gonzales and his team at SMC, Leigh Ann Bryson and her staff and colleagues at Tinker, and Sandy McGruder, the Air Force has established itself as one of the premier ADR programs in the country and is well-positioned to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead. Congratulations to them, and thanks to all those who submitted nominations!